

## From promises to purpose building: capacity enhancement of youths in regional water cooperation issues through Youth Basin Ambassador's Regional Youth Dialogue Program

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### Introduction

The Transboundary Rivers of South Asia ([TROSA](#)), a regional transboundary water governance program supported by the Government of Sweden, is being implemented in the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna (GBM) and the Salween river basins with aims to ensure that riverine communities uphold their rights, build their resilience, and participate in water resource management to overcome poverty. TROSA recognizes the positive cascading effect that women and youth representations can bring in the transboundary water resources governance and therefore engages with them at various levels such as conducting capacity building sessions, high level dialogues and also facilitates their meaningful engagement with governments, private sectors, and other actors. Regional Youth Dialogues (RYDs) on Water, Climate and Human Rights , Apr-Sep 2021 was another<sup>1</sup> major intervention that contributed to the capacity strengthening, participation and leadership building of the selected 14 Youth Basin Ambassadors (YBAs) from the GBM basins. Co-designing the entire RYD components and the drafting of a set of action agendas based on feminist practices, enhancing communication and networking skills under expert guidance and mentorship were unique features of the program.

### Objectives

Core objectives of the RYD initiative included identification and promotion of young voices for transboundary water cooperation and in cross-cutting issues of water, climate and human rights in the GBM basins, and promote their leadership in dialogues and decision-making on these issues by-

1. provisioning a regional platform/space to present their aspirations and experiences
2. identifying one or two interesting domains/areas of interest they would like to work on during and post RYD
3. capacity building inputs and mentoring support to further build the required skills
4. Formulating roadmaps for good governance in transboundary water management, climate change and human rights at the respective basins.

### Measuring RYD Impacts

Questionnaire-based surveys were conducted to evaluate the impact of the RYD program on Youth Basin Ambassadors. YBAs designed this program as an opportunity for

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<sup>1</sup>YBA -RYD program was a follow up action on e-winter school organized by TROSA in collaboration with the South Asian University (SAU) and the UNESCO Chair on International Water Cooperation at Uppsala University during April-June, 2020.

young leaders like themselves to; (a) to not only connect to a bigger network working in water, climate, and human rights domains across boundaries, (b) but also to make their voices heard on possible solutions to overcoming persisting challenges associated with these domains. Over the half year of mentoring and collaborative learning, RYD provided educational and leadership opportunities to acquire new knowledge and perspectives on local, national and cross-country prospects on programmatic themes.

## Survey Methodology

Two rounds of surveys (baseline at the beginning of the program and end line at the end) were conducted during coin of the program. Baseline survey aimed to record the current status of knowledge and awareness of YBAs on issues related to climate change, biodiversity loss, water governance and human rights in their respective as well as transboundary basins. The second survey, the end line, captured the changes in the level of knowledge and awareness of the YBAs at the end of the program. Baseline questionnaire was developed based on the objective and the areas, issues, and themes to be covered during the program. The same questions were used at the end line to register the changes in their knowledge and awareness levels. In addition, few additional questions were added to the end line based on the suggestions of the RYD secretariat.

Summary of the areas covered in both the surveys are given below.

- a. Net Promoter Score®<sup>2</sup> to measure the likelihood of the promotion/recommendation of YBA-RYD program by YBAs
- b. Scale of participation in relevant water governance, climate, river basin, and human rights related learning events as a result of RYD program
- c. Motivation to volunteer in future Regional Youth Dialogue or alike programs

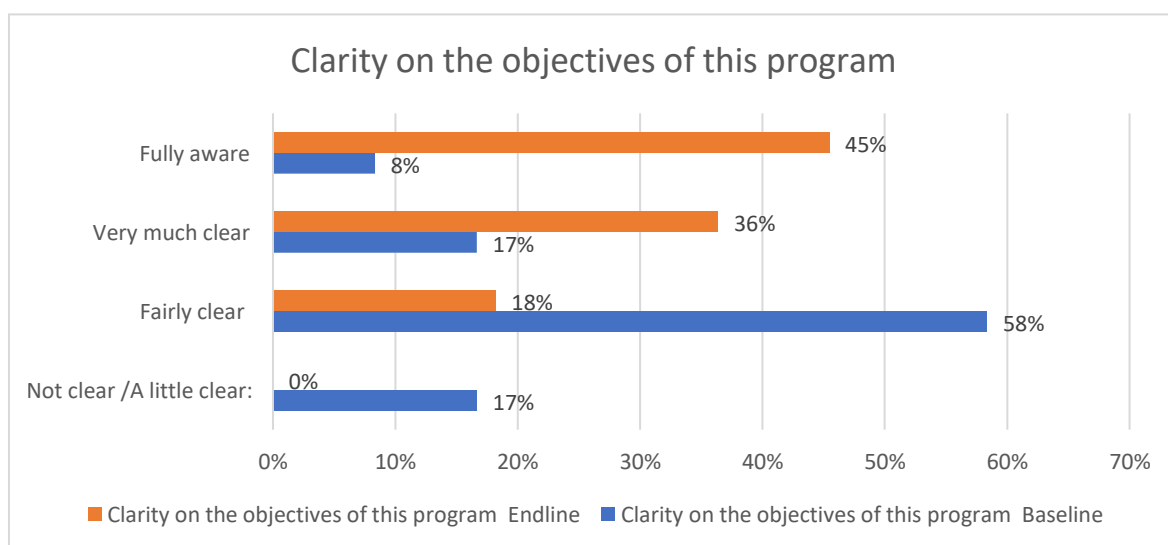
## Comparative Analysis of Survey Results

- a. Clarity on the objectives of this program: At the beginning of the program, 25% of the participants were fully aware or very much clear on the objectives of the RYD- YBA program which had improved to 81% at the end of the program. It reflects the incremental progress of understanding about the objective of this program among the participants, as illustrated in table #01

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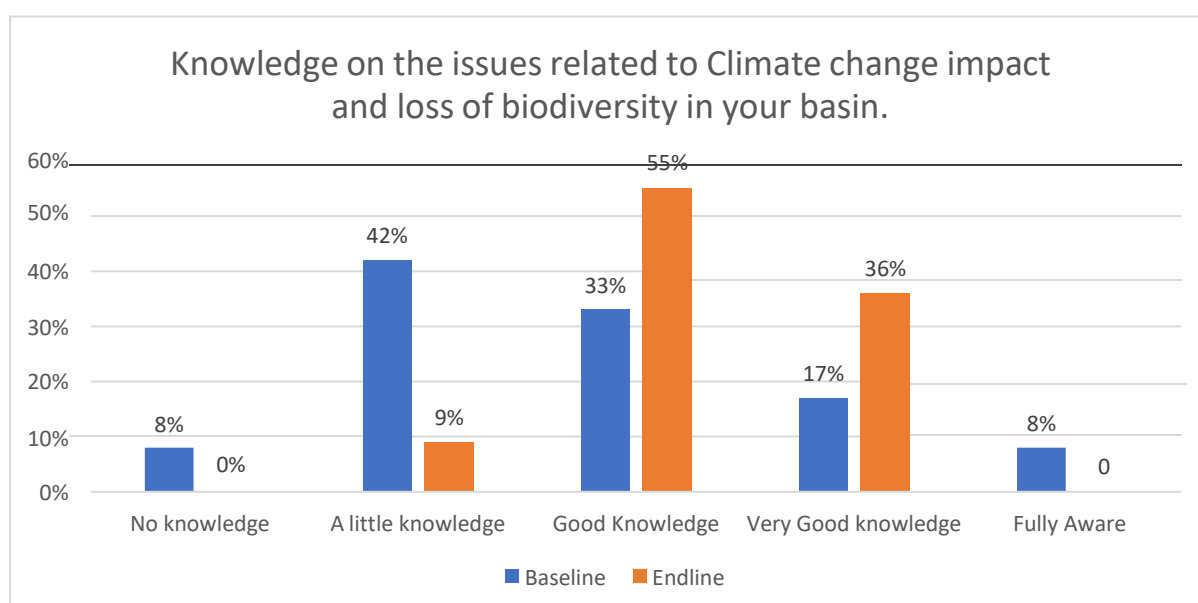
<sup>2</sup> Promoter Score®, or NPS®, measures customer experience and predicts business growth. It is a customer loyalty and satisfaction measurement taken from asking customers how likely they are to recommend your product or service to others on a scale of 0-10. <https://www.netpromoter.com/know/>

**Chart No-01: Clarity on RYD Program Objectives**



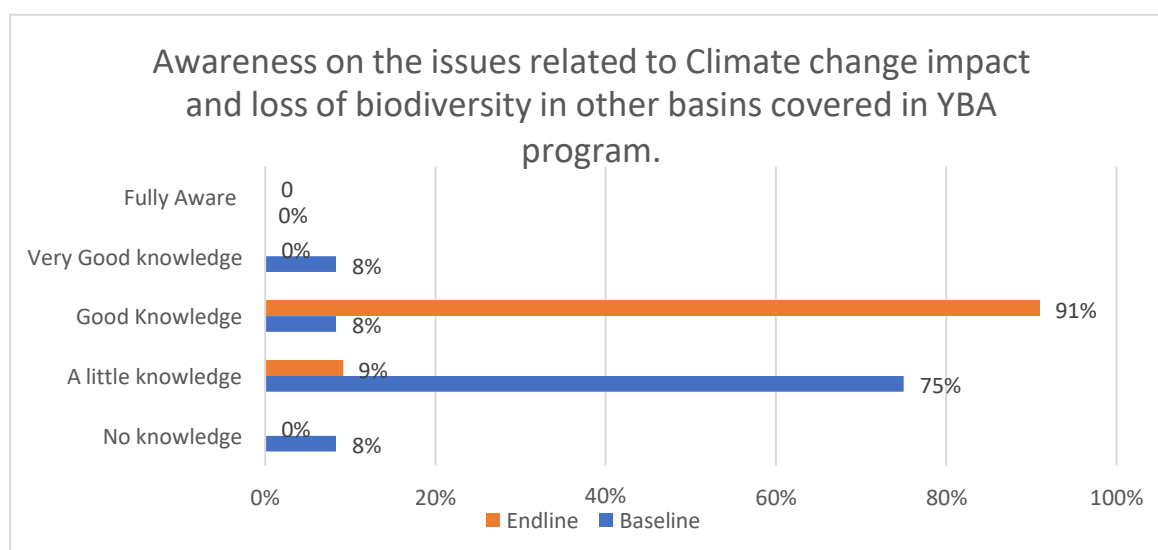
- b. Knowledge on the issues related to climate change impact and loss of biodiversity in the basin: At the beginning of the YBA program, 50% of the Youth Basin Ambassadors were not aware or had very little knowledge about the key issues related to climate change impacts, human rights issues and loss of biodiversity in the river basins they belong to. Whereas after two regional youth dialogues, 91% of the YBAs acquired good or very good knowledge and understanding of the issues related to climate change impact and loss of biodiversity in their basins, as presented in table no-02.

**Chart No-02: Knowledge on the issues related to climate change impacts, human rights, and loss of biodiversity in the basin**



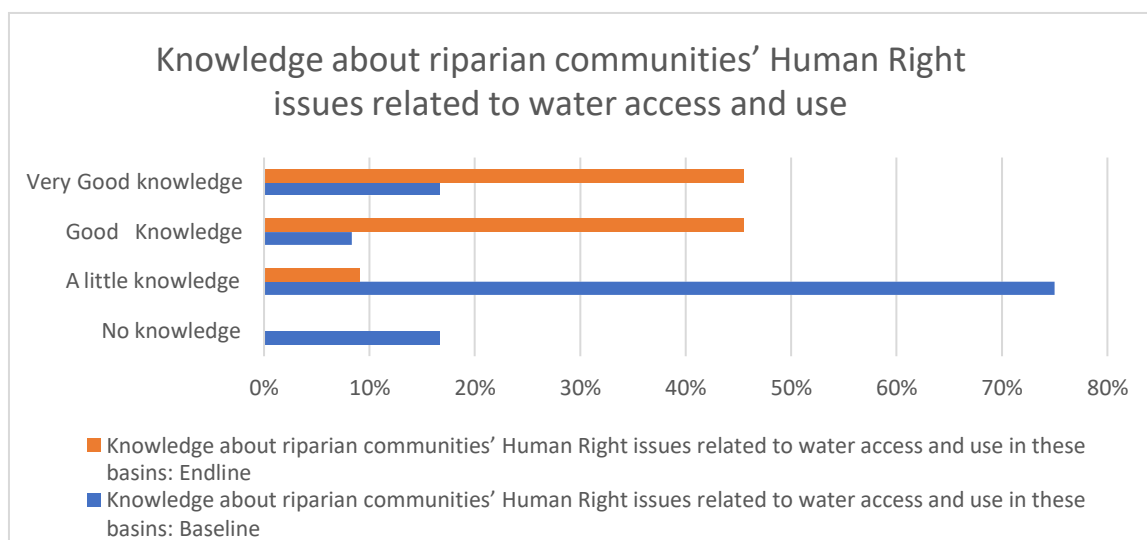
- c. Awareness on the issues of the other river basins: The RYD by YBA program proven very effective to enhance knowledge and awareness of the youths on issues related to climate change impact and loss of biodiversity in other cross-country basins covered by TROSA. At the beginning of the program, only 16% YBAs (2 out of 12 respondent of the survey) had good or very good knowledge about the issues related to climate change impact and loss of biodiversity in other basins covered in RYD whereas 91% (10 out of 12 respondents) of the participants reported having improved knowledge at the end of the program. Table No#3 depicts the trend.

**Chart No-03: Awareness on the issues of the other river basins**



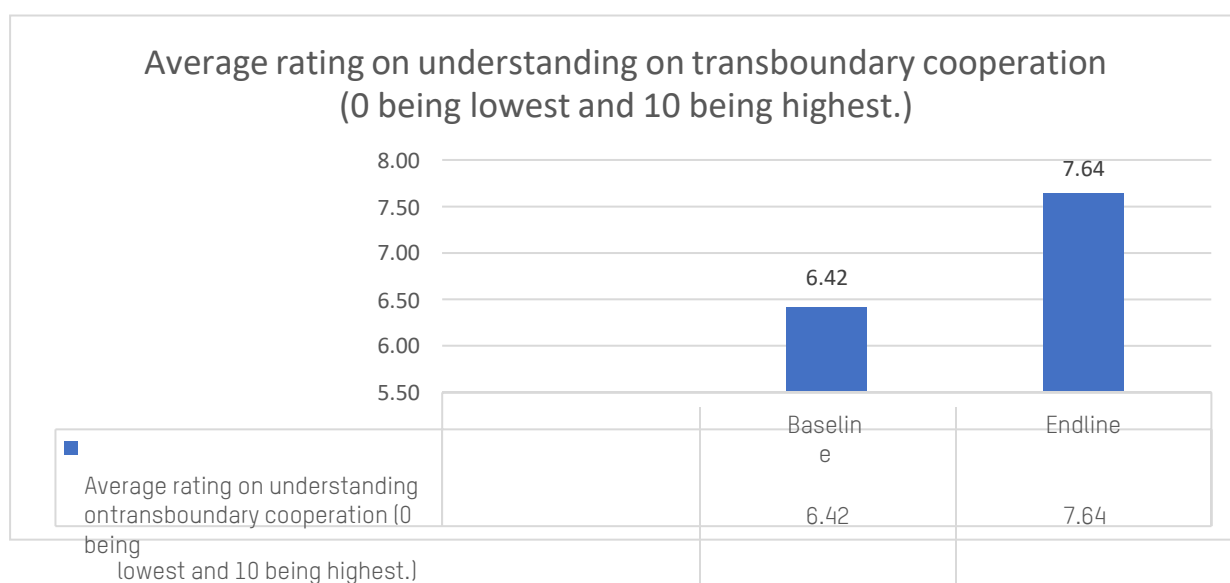
- d. Knowledge about riparian communities' human rights issues related to water access and use: 81% of the YBAs were not aware or had very little knowledge about the riparian communities' human rights issues related to water access and use in the GBM basins. Nevertheless, by end of the RYD series, 90% of participants reported having gained improved (good or very good) knowledge about the riparian communities' human rights matters related to water access and use in GBM basins. For more details, please refer to the table number-04.

**Chart No-04: Knowledge about riparian communities' human rights issues related to water access and use**



- e. Understanding on transboundary water cooperation: Survey findings reflected that the understanding of YBAs on transboundary water cooperation has improved in last six months due to this program. 19% increase in the rating in six months shows the incremental learning of YBAs as illustrated in Table #05.

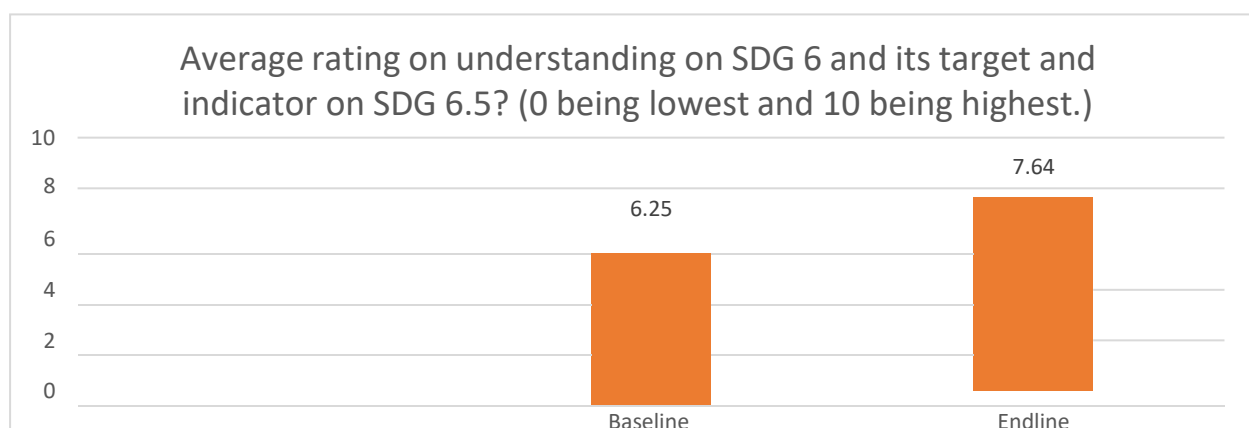
**Table No-01: Understanding on transboundary water cooperation**



- f. Understanding on SDG 6- clean water and sanitation and its target and indicator on SDG 6.5: like the result of question five, YBA's understanding on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 and particularly on indicator SDG 6.5 <sup>3</sup> had increased. As illustrated in Chart No-05, YBAs shared that there was 22% incremental change (on average ) in their understanding on SDG-6 and SDG 6.5. This is one of the important themes of the RYD initiative linked to TROSA's key program objectives.

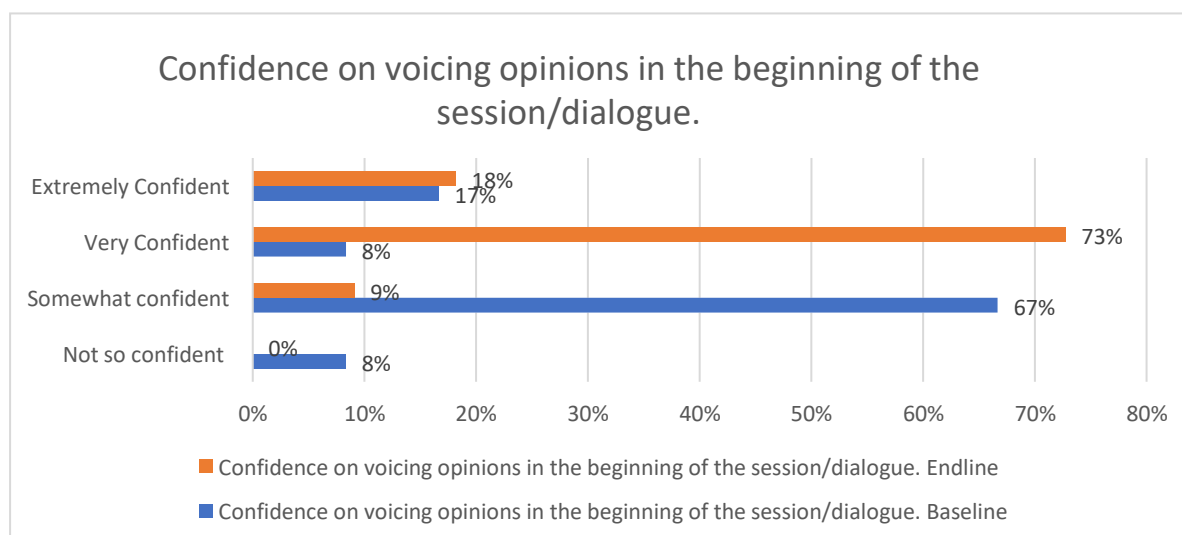
<sup>3</sup> By 2030, implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate. (<https://www.sdg6monitoring.org/indicators/target-65/>)

**Chart No-05: Understanding on SDG 6 and 6.5**



- g. Confidence on voicing opinions in the beginning of the sessions and dialogue: 91% of the participants reported that they were very confident or extremely confident to voice their opinions on water governance, climate change, river basins and related issues by the time RYD program reached its end. Whereas only 25% YBAs were feeling very confident or extremely confident to voice their opinion at the beginning of the program in April 2021, detailed in Chart #06.

**Chart No-06: Confidence on voicing opinions in the beginning of the sessions and dialogue**



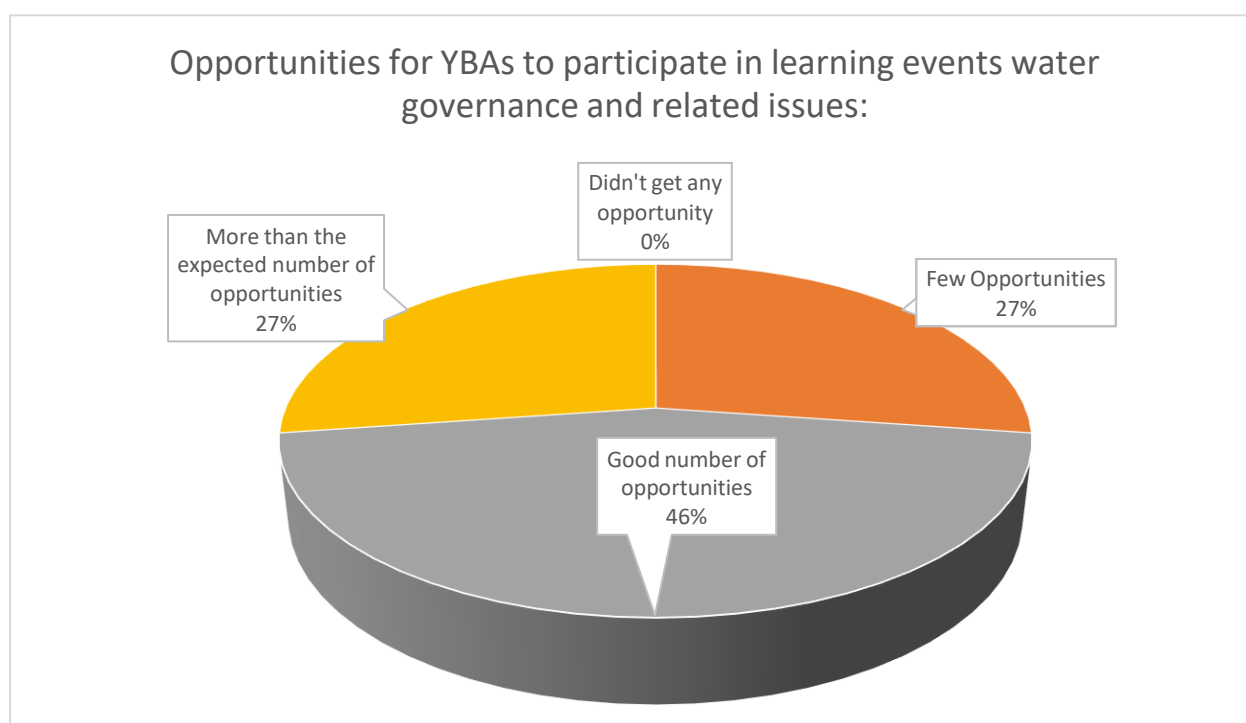
- h. Opportunities for YBAs to participate in regional water governance and related issue's learning events

All YBAs responded that they got opportunities to participate in relevant water governance, climate, river basin, and human rights related learning events throughout the RYD journey. 73% respondents shared that they got good number of opportunities or more

than expected opportunities for participation in different learning events at the global scale. Most of the YBAs got opportunities to participate, lead and collaborate with TROSA's partners for voicing their understanding on thematic issues in more than six key events.

- a. TROSA's Annual Learning Forum April 2021,
- b. Meghna Knowledge Forum June 2021,
- c. IHE Delft Conference on Water, Sep 2021
- d. International Youth Conference organized by Oxfam in Nepal and partners, Aug 2021,
- e. Indigenous knowledge and (NbS) Nature-based Solution session during World Water Week, Nov 2021,
- f. Multi-stakeholders dialogue among India and Bangladesh on Brahmaputra River Basin issue (organized by CUTS International), Sep 2021.

**Chart No-07: Opportunities to participate in regional water governance and related issue's learning events**

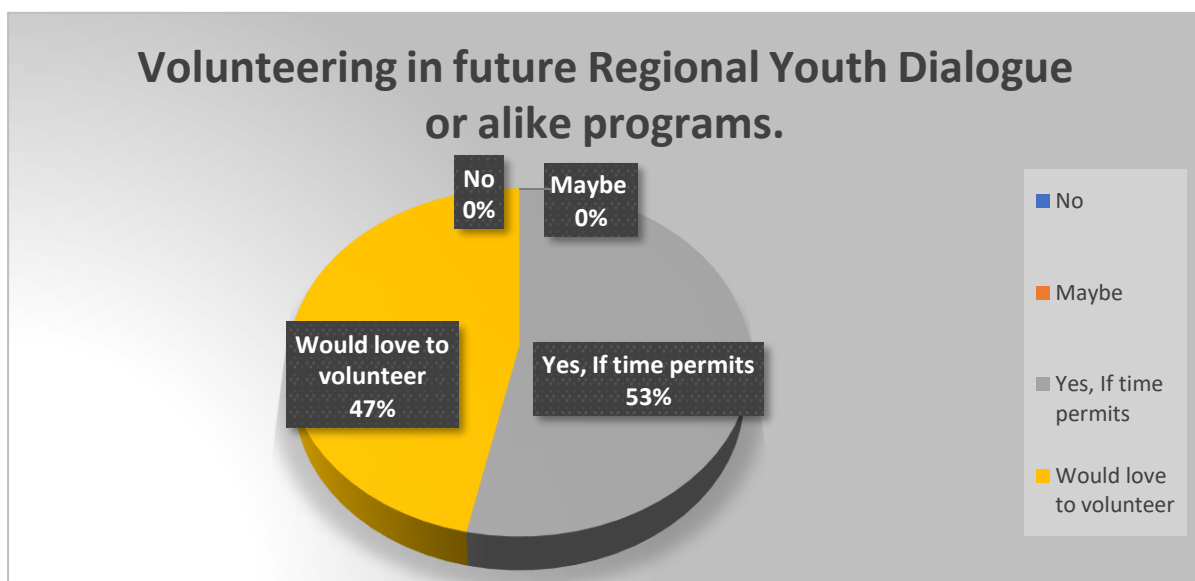


As a result of these learning opportunities, YBAs had the unique chance to generate solid research works build on their past experiences and its interconnectedness to their future plans. Lists of blogs and communication products generated due to their collective teamwork and efforts to contribute to the knowledge economy are as follows.

1. IYC      YBA      Key      Message      Video  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NtpCvYCEwqU>
2. MKF      River      Game      Video  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tPUqs8P\\_HyM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tPUqs8P_HyM)

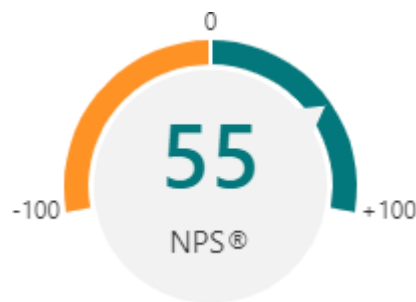
3. Blog : Water Pollutions and COVID-19: Interlinked Yet Separate? What can Youths do? Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna basins in Focus. Sarita SRout, Manini Syali, Khadizatul Kobra Nahin, Keshari Tiwari <https://iwa-connect.org/document/search/recent?previewDocument=60ec2914c068a15e1be52ba4&sortBy=new Documents>
  4. Blog: Co-Creating Solutions for Transboundary Wellbeing under Water-Climate-Human Rights Nexus. Ritu Priya, Mayuri Phukan, Sarita S Rout <https://neda.org.in/2021/06/04/co-creating-solutions-for-transboundary-wellbeing-under-water-climate-human-rights-nexus/>
  5. Blog: Young people have the power to transform food systems <https://asia.oxfam.org/latest/blogs/young-people-have-power-transform-food-systems-0>
- i. Scope of volunteering in future Regional Youth Dialogue or alike programs: all YBA respondents expressed their willingness to volunteer in future Regional Youth Dialogue or alike programs which shows great acceptance and ownership of this program among YBAs as depicted in Chart No-08.

**Chart No-08: Scope of volunteering in future Regional Youth Dialogue or alike programs**



- j. Net Promoter Score- NPS®: We relied on the [Net Promoter Score- NPS®](#) using 0-10 scale to know the likelihood of promotion or recommendation of this program by the YBAs to a friend or a relative. Each respondent was grouped into three categories a: Detractors (Score 0-6), b: Passive (Score 7-8), c: Promoters (Score 9-10). Subtracting the percentage of Detractors from the percentage of Promoters yields the Net Promoter Score, which can range from a low of -100 (if every customer is a Detractor) to a high of 100 (if every customer is a Promoter)





(<https://www.netpromoter.com/know/>). We got NPS score 55 for this program which is excellent<sup>4</sup>.

### Suggestions for Future Program Design

- a. Respondents suggested that such intensive engagement programs should run for more than six months as it demands committed time from participants, and incentivization of the program will be helpful for participants.
- b. This RYD should continue as it provided great learning opportunities. If situation permits, a physical retreat or conclave among the YBAs (both alumni and recent) once in a year would be great.
- c. In the next format, the program could arrange topic-wise themes and there can be primary and secondary sessions, with primary sessions only covering knowledge building sessions. And for the secondary session, the participants will showcase their ideas and projects in gradual steps with quick review and feedback from the experts.
- d. Engaging field level stakeholders of the related basin would be a nice idea. Some skill-oriented capacity building at the community level will be useful.
- e. The action plan proposals were very unique outcomes of the program. The program team should facilitate scaling up the proposed ideas by involving the RYD participants in future or by supporting YBAs in their efforts to scale up elsewhere.

In nutshell, impacts above show that youths are potential leaders if programs like RYD could contribute to their capacity enhancement with the intentions to not only contribute to their improved exposure but also to prepare them to take a position in regional water cooperation issues. For instance, YBAs received extensive mentoring for the drafting of four roadmap proposal development. As a result of this exercise, 01 team submitted the same roadmap proposal to an external funder - Youth Water Climate project grant, 2021 worth 4000 euros (<https://youthwaterclimate.org/call-for-proposals/>) which remained unsuccessful and another proposal to IHE Delft for international conference on

<sup>4</sup> NPS is widely used as a measuring tool to record customer's experiences and their overall perception regarding a brand in business. We adopted this tool in RYD program to capture the overall experience and perception of YBAs. A NPS score of 55 for RYD means an excellent rating of the program.

sociohydrology was successfully accepted (<https://www.un-ihe.org/delft-international-conference-sociohydrology>). These side events could boost their confidence and courage to current and future engagements.

## References

Oxfam, 2021. Call for application. Available at <https://asia.oxfam.org/latest/blogs/call-applications-regional-youth-dialogue-ryd-water-climate-and-human-rights-youth>

Disclaimer: Sarita Sundari Rout and Avinash Singh, both the authors work for Oxfam in Cambodia's Transboundary Rivers of South Asia Program. Views expressed here are that of the authors and not necessary of the organization.